Integrating Skilled Immigrants into the Alberta Economy

September 2004

Alberta

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Introduction

This strategy focuses on the economic integration of Albertans with an international credential – a trades certificate, college diploma or university degree earned outside Canada.

Throughout this document this population is referred to as skilled immigrants. Although not addressed in this document, this economic integration strategy is just one piece of a larger picture that includes the social and cultural integration of all new Albertans, regardless of their credentials or qualifications.

The content for this strategy for integrating skilled immigrants into the Alberta economy comes from two sources:

- Work of a cross-ministry working group consisting of officials from five Alberta government ministries, including:
  - Alberta Learning,
  - Alberta Human Resources and Employment,
  - Alberta Health and Wellness,
  - Alberta Community Development, and
  - Alberta Economic Development.
- Input gathered from over 40 stakeholder groups from June to September 2003.

Stakeholders were overwhelmingly supportive of the need for a comprehensive strategy for integrating skilled immigrants. They validated the framework, identified how they could be involved, and suggested coordination mechanisms as well as priorities for action.

"[We] strongly support the development of a comprehensive strategy that will facilitate integration of skilled immigrants."

-stakeholder input

"Government needs to be sure that immigrants to Alberta get full recognition for the professional qualifications they bring with them so that they can make the greatest possible contribution to the province."

- Today's Opportunities, Tomorrow's Promise: A strategic plan for the Government of Alberta

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A. Integrating Skilled Immigrants

1. The Importance of Skilled Immigrants for Alberta's Economy

Several factors are driving the need for a made-in-Alberta strategy for integrating skilled immigrants.[1]

1. Alberta's future economic success depends on the province's ability to attract, retain, and develop the people and skills essential for a knowledge-based economy. [2]

2. Post-secondary education will be a requirement for over 60% of the 156,870 new jobs to be added to Alberta's economy between 2003 and 2008. Existing jobs will continue to require higher levels of education and skills.

3. Between 1997 and 2001, approximately 29,000 immigrants with post-secondary credentials arrived in Alberta.[3] However, Alberta research estimated that about half are unemployed or under employed.[4]

4. Alberta is facing shortages in specific skill and occupational areas. In 2003, 21 of 53 occupational groups in Alberta had an unemployment rate below 3%.[5] These shortages are expected to continue and to become more widespread.

5. Increasingly, immigration will be a key source of Alberta's and Canada's supply of skilled labour. If current levels of immigration rates continue, it is possible that immigration could account for virtually all net labour force growth by 2011.[6]

Other Canadian provinces are implementing strategies to improve the integration of skilled immigrants into the labour market.[7]

The goal of Alberta's strategy for integrating skilled immigrants is to maximize their ability to contribute their prior learning, skills and experience to benefit the Alberta economy.

During the past decade Canada's workforce has been shaped by:

1. Demand for skills for the knowledge-based economy,

2. An aging working-age population,

3. Growing reliance on immigration as a source of skills and labour market growth.

2001 Census, The changing profile of Canada's labour force

[1] Skilled immigrants are defined as those who arrived in Canada with a post-secondary credential – college diploma or certificate, apprenticeship training, or university degree.
[2] *Delivering on our Potential – Value-Added Strategy for Alberta, 2003.*
[3] This includes a university degree, a non-university diploma or a trade certificate.
[4] *Foreign-trained Professionals and Tradespeople in Alberta: Challenges and Opportunities*, Bradley Wells for Alberta Learning, 2002.
[5] Calculated from Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey Microdata, Annual Average 2003. Caution on sample size.
[6] *The changing profile of Canada's labour force*, Statistics Canada, 2001 Census: analysis series, February 2003.
[7] In particular Ontario, British Columbia, and Manitoba have introduced specific initiatives to improve the labour market integration of skilled immigrants. Some of these are listed on page 21.

2. Recognition of the Under-Utilization of Immigrant Skills

> "Alberta is missing a huge opportunity to take advantage of the knowledge and skills these individuals bring to the country and economy."
>
> *- stakeholder input*

A study on the under-employment of skilled immigrants in Alberta identified that half of the immigrants who came with a post-secondary credential were not able to fully apply their prior education, training or experience. The major contributors to immigrant under-employment included poor pre-migration information, lack of understanding of the credentialing process in Alberta, limited access to bridging programs, and level of English language proficiency. [8] Section 3 on Immigration and Labour Market Challenges provides more information on the barriers to the integration of skilled immigrants.

National and other provincial research has confirmed that the skills and education of skilled immigrants are under-utilized in the Canadian economy. The labour market performance of skilled immigrants declined between 1986 and 1996.[9] Even though immigrants are more educated and have better English skills than previously, they have achieved lower levels of employment and are having more difficulty integrating into the labour market.

The Conference Board of Canada estimates that Canada would gain approximately $3.5 billion annually by improving the system of learning recognition for skilled immigrants and other Canadians. [10] There is a growing consensus on the economic and social importance of improving the integration of immigrants into the labour market and broader society.

- The provincial and territorial Ministers' Working Together submission to the federal government (2002) calls for federal government action to support improved labour market outcomes for skilled immigrants. [11]

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[8] *Foreign-Trained Professionals and Tradespeople in Alberta*, Bradley Wells for Alberta Learning, 2002.

[9] A Statistics Canada report: *The changing profile of Canada's labour force* states that "The labour market outcomes of immigrants are poor and worsening. New immigrants had a jobless rate double the national average, an employment rate 16 percentage points below Canadian-born citizens and almost half were in low skill jobs." (February 2003, pages 12-13).

[10] *Brain Drain/Brain Gain*, Conference Board of Canada. The $3.5 billion is an estimate of the earnings foregone by skilled immigrants due to non-recognition of prior learning and experience. This study also reported that between 34,000 and 83,000 post-secondary degree holders would be added to Canada if it addressed some of the key barriers to learning recognition faced by immigrants. Another study by J. Reitz (2001, University of Toronto) estimates that Canadian immigrants' earnings are $11 billion under what they would be if their skills were fully utilized.

[11] *Working Together to Strengthen Learning and Labour Market Training* was released after a joint meeting held in October 2002 of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada and the Provincial-Territorial Labour Market Ministers.

- The federal Innovation Strategy includes integration strategies for skilled immigrants as a priority for achieving innovation and productivity goals. [12] This was confirmed by the National Summit on Innovation and Learning (in November 2002) where participants stressed the need for the federal government to work with partners to increase the integration of immigrants into the labour force.

- At their June 2003 meeting in Halifax, the Council of Ministers of Education Canada, the Forum of Labour Market Ministers and Human Resources Development Canada reached federal/provincial/territorial consensus on priority areas to strengthen skills and learning in Canada. Encouraging the full labour market participation of immigrants was identified as one of the priority areas.

- In January 2004, the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers of Immigration announced that they will "actively pursue solutions within their jurisdictions to ensure that the credentials of newcomers are recognized in Canada, and will step up efforts to engage employers, professional associations, and other licensing bodies." [13]

- At the February 2004 Council of the Federation meetings, Canada's Premiers identified recognition of international credentials as one of the priority actions to improve trade in Canada.

- *Today's Opportunities, Tomorrow's Promises - A Strategic Plan for the Government of Alberta* released in March 2004 noted "government also needs to make sure that immigrants to Alberta get full recognition for the professional qualifications they bring with them so that they can make the greatest possible contribution to the province." [14]

Federal and provincial immigration ministers agreed on the need for stronger partnerships to help address skill shortages by attracting the skilled immigrants required to further develop the Canadian labour market and economy.

Considering the current and future role of immigrants in Alberta's economy and the labour market challenges that they face, having an effective economic integration strategy for skilled immigrants is an essential component of Alberta's commitment to maximize the potential of its human resources.

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[12] Released February 2002, includes two reports: *Knowledge Matters, Skills and Learning for Canadians*, and *Achieving Excellence: Investing in People, Knowledge and Opportunity*.

[13] Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat News Release, Federal-Provincial-Territorial Meeting of Ministers responsible for Immigration, Victoria, British Columbia, January 22, 2004.

[14] *Today's Opportunities, Tomorrow's Promise: A Strategic Plan for the Government of Alberta*, Government of Alberta, March 2004, page 8.

3. Immigration and Labour Market Challenges

Many stakeholders impact the labour market integration of immigrants:

- skilled immigrants and their advocacy groups
- professional regulatory bodies, colleges and associations
- post-secondary institutions
- employers
- labour organizations
- sector councils
- immigrant serving organizations
- employment service providers
- communities
- federal, provincial and municipal governments

About half of the immigrants who arrive with a post-secondary credential have difficulty finding work in their profession or trade in Alberta. The reasons for this are complex and are further complicated by the large number of stakeholders and their differing roles and responsibilities in the process of immigration and labour market integration. This section describes the key components of an effective economic integration strategy and identifies the stakeholders that need to be involved.

Pre-Migration Information

The challenge for skilled immigrants begins overseas. Citizenship and Immigration Canada selects skilled immigrants based on their education, training and work experience. Consistently, research has identified two major issues:

- The skilled immigrant is selected based on his/her education, occupation and experience, but it is not always clearly communicated that the federal immigration selection process has no bearing on the immigrant's ability to get licensed or work in his/her profession or trade in Canada.

- From outside Canada, there is no single comprehensive source to readily obtain specific national, provincial or regional labour market information, along with appropriate and accessible information on how to access professions and trades or the labour market.

Credential Assessment

- An internationally trained individual typically needs to go through a number of assessments performed by a variety of different organizations. These include assessments of academic credentials, English language proficiency, work experience, and professional theory and practice competencies.

- There is little national or provincial coordination, standardization or transparency of assessment. Even within a province, different organizations may assess the same credential differently.

- Some individuals are discouraged from proceeding with the process because assessment and examination fees, and associated expenses such as travel to examination sites, may cost applicants from hundreds to thousands of dollars.

Key stakeholders involved in credential assessment include:

- Professional Credentials: Professional regulatory bodies, colleges and associations. These are organizations created under provincial government legislation to protect the public interest through assessing qualifications, setting professional standards and entry to practice requirements, and granting licenses to practice to those who meet the requirements.
- Academic Credentials: Alberta Learning - International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS); post-secondary institutions,
- Trade Qualifications: Alberta Learning - Apprenticeship and Industry Training,
- English Language: post-secondary institutions, language assessment and referral centres, private testing firms.

> "Prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) programs will assist with gap analysis and will allow skilled immigrants to build on existing skills and knowledge rather than require that they re-enter their chosen profession at the beginning student level."
>
> *- stakeholder input*

Specialized Advice and Counselling

The multi-jurisdictional nature of the Canadian labour market and credential assessment processes leave many immigrants confused about how to identify pathways and options. Although the following organizations provide information and may provide some advice and counselling, there may be a need for more specialized advice and counselling, career planning and management to assist a skilled immigrant to re-enter his or her profession or trade in Alberta.

- Professional regulatory bodies, colleges and associations,
- Post-secondary institutions,
- Alberta Learning - Apprenticeship and Industry Training,
- Alberta Human Resources and Employment - Alberta Service Centres or Canada-Alberta Service Centres,
- Third-party service providers (funded by Alberta Human Resources and Employment), and
- Immigrant serving organizations (funded by Alberta Learning).

> "English language training combined with skill and Canadian workplace training is essential because despite the fact they have had previous English classes and may have relatively high scores there are gaps in their ability to use
> language especially in the workplace."
>
> *- stakeholder input*

"Encouraging employers and educational institutions to provide preceptor and mentoring situations will facilitate the successful integration of skilled immigrants into the workplace."

- stakeholder input

Training Programs to Bridge Gaps

- English language proficiency is fundamental to effective labour market integration. Although individuals may be fluent in the English required for daily living, some immigrants may lack the technical English or cross-cultural communication skills needed for the Canadian workplace.

- An immigrant's prior learning and experience may be assessed as being partially but not totally equivalent to the standards in Alberta, or they may have all the required skills but lack knowledge of Canadian workplace practices.

- Currently, the demand for programs that bridge the gaps between prior knowledge and Canadian requirements (generally including skill training, occupation-specific English as a second language training and supported work experience) exceeds the available supply of training seats in Alberta.

- Where bridging programs are not available, immigrants are faced with the prospect of duplicating learning they already have, or taking available refresher or upgrading courses that may not always be the most appropriate.

- Financing may be a barrier. Immigrants who have been in Canada less than one year do not qualify for student loans, or may not have the credit established to secure a loan. Many immigrants are also not eligible for Employment Insurance funded upgrading or provincial grants to attend educational programs.

Welcoming Workplaces

Employers may be risk-adverse in their hiring decisions and reluctant to hire individuals without Canadian work experience, and may not view the different experiences of immigrants as an asset.

Bridging programs that incorporate supported work experience or training-on-the-job components for immigrants or mentoring programs have been effective at providing opportunities for immigrants to acculturate and demonstrate their knowledge and skills to Canadian employers.

B. Stakeholder Input

1. Who We Asked

From May to September 2003, members of the cross-ministry working group sought input from key stakeholders on a framework for integrating skilled immigrants into the Alberta economy.

Working group members contacted stakeholder groups to present and get verbal input on the discussion document, or copies of the discussion document were distributed and organizations were asked to provide their comments in writing. More than 40 organizations participated in a discussion and/or submitted written comments to five questions.

Organizations invited to provide input are listed in Appendix 2.

More than 40 stakeholders provided input:

- 12 post secondary institutions
- 11 professional regulatory bodies, colleges and associations
- 9 immigrant serving or advocacy organizations
- 7 employers and business associations
- federal, provincial and municipal departments

2. What We Asked

Input was obtained on five questions:

1. Do you agree there is a need for a comprehensive strategy to integrate skilled immigrants?
2. Do you agree on the key components of the strategy framework? Can you suggest any other changes or additions to the model?
3. What role could you or your organization play in the strategy?
4. How can leadership and coordination best be provided to assist skilled immigrants?
5. What would you suggest as priorities for action?

"The strategy needs to be determined as quickly as possible, and then be followed through in order to meet the needs of both new Albertans and Alberta employers who are facing challenges now."

- stakeholder input

3. What We Heard

In addition to responding to the five questions, stakeholders also provided a wide range of comments and suggestions that are incorporated in all sections of this strategy.

There was overwhelming agreement on:

- the importance of this issue and the need for a comprehensive strategy,
- the key components, principles and outcomes of the framework,
- the role of Alberta government leadership, coordination, and financial support,

- stakeholders wanting to play a role in the coordinating mechanism, and/or providing specific programs and services, and
- the need for additional resources.

"Governments should coordinate their services to new immigrants, potential employers, professional associations, and post-secondary institutions. This coordination should begin by clearly identifying priorities, establishing strategies, filling gaps and creating new programs where none exist. Funding will be essential but some savings should be realized through rationalization of services and elimination of redundancies."

- stakeholder input

Respondents did not provide specific details on a coordinating mechanism other than the need to involve governments and stakeholders and link to national and international organizations and initiatives.

Stakeholders overwhelmingly agreed the Alberta government should play a role in:

- setting strategic policy directions,
- facilitating change,
- working with the federal government,
- funding identified priorities,
- coordinating responses among the many stakeholders.

The stakeholders wanted to continue to be involved in development, planning and implementation.

They also agreed that the Alberta government should coordinate processes to:

- build on best practices and lessons learned in Alberta and nationally,
- increase coordination within Alberta,
- facilitate multi-stakeholder input and encourage information-sharing,
- determine and communicate common goals, priorities and strategies,
- monitor, report and account for progress.

A number of organizations also raised the need to have this strategy placed within the context of a broader Alberta policy on immigration. This broader policy would encompass the economic and social integration of all classes of immigrants, ensuring that communities were welcoming and supportive of immigrants, and would include an information campaign so that potential immigrants are aware of the Alberta Advantage.

A number of submissions also suggested actions such as expanding the Provincial Nominee Program to attract and bring in skilled immigrants, and the need to develop new approaches to expedite the entry of temporary workers and students.

C. Strategy

1. Principles

The principles guiding this strategy are:

- Alberta standards maintained - The standards protecting public interest and safety of Albertans will be maintained while facilitating the labour market integration of skilled immigrants.

- Comprehensive, integrated and sustained approach - A comprehensive integrated and longer-term approach is needed to effectively maximize the skills of Albertans.

- Multi-stakeholder collaboration - The roles, expertise and jurisdictional responsibilities of all stakeholders will be recognized and respected.

- Fair and merit-based recognition of prior qualifications - The focus will be on addressing gaps in education, skills, knowledge or experience needed to meet Alberta's labour market requirements.

- Individual responsibility - Self-direction and individual responsibility for labour market success will be emphasized.

- Established best practices and current infrastructure - Actions will build on expertise, best practices, programs and services that already exist.

- Human capital maximized - A key strategy supporting labour force development is to maximize and value the education, skills, talents and knowledge of all Albertans, including immigrants, Aboriginal people, and persons with disabilities.

- Accountable programs and services - Accountability for decisions, choices, and outcomes will be ensured.

2. Six Key Components

"The labour force stakeholders must be at the table with immigrant serving agencies, ESL providers, post-secondary institutions, accrediting bodies, etc., and it must be aggressively pushed by government."

- stakeholder input

The six components are based on the major challenges currently faced by skilled immigrants in achieving their employment potential. [15]

1. Information - Increase the availability, access and use of occupation-specific information about the Alberta labour market by skilled immigrants prior to immigration and after arrival, to improve preparedness, to increase awareness and usage of services and programs available, and to support self-directed pursuit of employment goals.

2. Assessment - Support the development of assessment capacity in Alberta, including assessment of academic credentials, training, work experience, language, theory and practice competencies, and prior learning assessment and recognition.

3. Specialized advice and counselling - Assist and support professional associations, immigrant serving agencies, career development and post-secondary counsellors to provide career and educational planning advice and counselling to skilled immigrants.

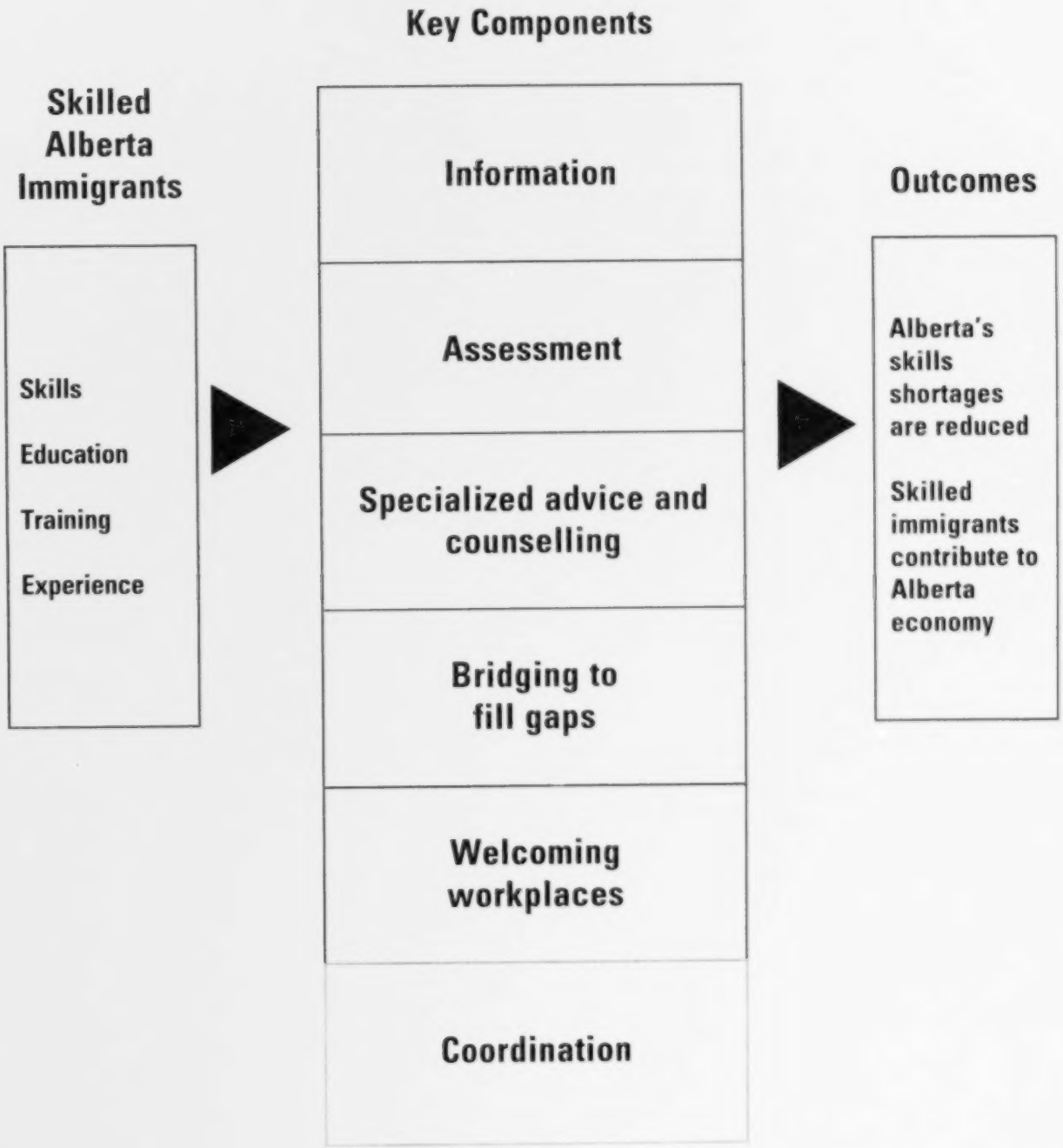
4. Bridging to fill gaps - Increase the accessibility of integrated bridging programs that address occupation-specific gaps in technical and workplace language and culture, education, skills, and Canadian work experience.

5. Welcoming workplaces - Increase awareness of the economic and societal benefits of diversity, awareness and understanding of the skills and knowledge of immigrants in Alberta workplaces, and encourage the involvement of industry, employers, employees, and labour organizations to maximize the ability of skilled immigrants to contribute economically.

6. Coordination - Increase coordination among stakeholders to build on best practices, determine common goals, priorities and strategies, to coordinate and evaluate activities, and to report and account for progress.

[15] These key components are based on the challenges and opportunities faced by Alberta's skilled immigrants as identified in Alberta research (Bradley Wells for Alberta Learning, 2002). This research is corroborated by national and pan-Canadian research undertaken recently and over the past decade that has identified employment-related barriers faced by skilled immigrants.

Alberta's Strategy for Integrating Skilled Immigrants



D. Recent Achievements and Next Steps

This section on Recent Achievements and Next Steps is not a complete inventory of all activities in Alberta assisting immigrants, but is a summary of Alberta government supported activities contributing to the economic integration of skilled immigrants that were undertaken since the fall of 2003. The next steps include activities planned over the next three years as part of ministry 2004-2007 business plans.

1. Information

Increase the availability, access and use of occupation-specific information about the Alberta labour market by skilled immigrants prior to immigration and after arrival, to improve preparedness, to increase awareness and usage of services and programs available, and to support self-directed pursuit of employment goals.

Current Challenges and Opportunities:

- Occupation-specific information about the Alberta labour market and credentialing procedures is important for skilled immigrants, before and after immigration, but may not always be easily accessible or sufficiently detailed.
- National Internet sites and other information could benefit from linkages with Alberta-specific sites and information.
- Alberta has the opportunity to build on existing Internet sites such as Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) and Service Alberta.

Recent Achievements Include:

- Information on licensing and registration requirements for employment in Alberta (titled CERTinfo) was developed, printed and distributed to employment counsellors and posted on the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website.
- The types of information and most appropriate media for conveying settlement and labour market information to new immigrants and prospective immigrants was identified.

Next Steps:

- Develop and distribute information products targeted to skilled immigrants, including a Welcome to Alberta immigration website to link to existing Internet sites.
- Encourage the federal government to develop international information dissemination strategies through visa offices and an Internet portal that increases understanding on the part of skilled immigrants of the employment challenges and opportunities in specific provinces.

2. Assessment

Support the development of assessment capacity in Alberta, including assessment of academic credentials, training, work experience, language, theory and practice competencies, and prior learning assessment and recognition.

Current Challenges and Opportunities:

- Professional regulatory bodies, colleges and associations may have limited resources or interest in further developing their assessment capabilities.
- Prior learning assessment practices are developing, but are slow to be implemented.
- Immigrants are more successful at obtaining professional licensing where the professional licensing body has established international reciprocal agreements.
- Some immigrants cannot afford the application, assessment and examination fees which can total in the thousands of dollars.
- Educational assessments, trades assessments, and English language assessments are available in Alberta, however, services are limited in terms of accessibility and scope.

Recent Achievements Include:

- The International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS), which provides educational assessment services, has been expanded. Alberta Human Resources and Employment now covers the costs of the assessments for individuals who qualify.
- A survey of IQAS customers was completed to see whether clients served by IQAS were satisfied with the services received, and to ascertain whether these services were effective in facilitating a smooth transition of clients into the labour force or into further post-secondary studies.

Next Steps:

- Continue to increase the capacity of IQAS to provide expertise on international credential recognition to professional colleges and associations, occupational regulatory bodies, educational institutions and employers.
- Work with the federal government, other provincial governments, the Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM) and the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC) to develop tools and approaches for assessment that have national utility. Encourage the federal government to develop mechanisms that support the use of assessment tools prior to immigrants coming to Canada.

3. Specialized Advice and Counselling

Assist and support professional associations, immigrant serving agencies, career development and post-secondary counsellors to provide career and educational planning advice and counselling to skilled immigrants.

Current Challenges and Opportunities:

- Specialized expertise is required to counsel skilled immigrants on pathways to successful integration in their specific fields.
- Successful counselling to skilled immigrants occurs where strong partnerships have resulted in shared information, common understandings, and identification of barriers and pathways for skilled immigrants.
- Some labour market counselling and development of learning plans is available through contracted immigrant settlement services or labour market services. However, better access to specialized occupation-specific knowledge is required.

Recent Achievements Include:

- There are several contracts providing services for internationally qualified Albertans. Two examples are the Bredin Institute in Edmonton and Bow Valley College in Calgary, which provide specialized advice and counselling and link skilled immigrants to other services that they require.

Next Steps:

- Monitor the progress and effectiveness of the counselling services targeted to skilled immigrants.
- Identify and share best practices through conferences, newsletters and trade shows.
- Encourage the federal government to increase funding for immigrant settlement services through the national settlement allocation model.

4. Bridging to Fill Gaps

Increase the accessibility of integrated bridging programs that address occupation-specific gaps in technical and workplace language and culture, education, skills, and Canadian work experience.

Current Challenges and Opportunities:

- The current demand for occupation-specific bridging programs for skilled immigrants exceeds supply. Waiting lists are long and the number of applicants is large compared to the number of seats available.
- Financial barriers prevent some immigrants from accessing the required programming. For example, immigrants may not meet the residency criteria to apply for student loans.
- There is limited accessibility in post-secondary institutions to partial programs of study.
- Opportunities to take part directly in job-related activities are key for the success of bridging programs. This includes job placements, mentor support and work experience.

Recent Achievements Include:

- Occupation-specific bridging programs that address labour market needs are continuing to be funded. Additional bridging programs funded since January 2004 include the Integrated Bridging Program for Internationally Trained Accountants and Auditors, and the Nurse Credentialing for Foreign Qualified Nurses Pilot Program.

Next Steps:

- A call for proposals for the Canada-Alberta Integrated Language Training for Skilled Immigrants was developed and released. This partnership with the federal government will fund language training integrated with employability components.
- Fund additional language training integrated with employability components to increase the settlement and labour market integration of skilled immigrants in Alberta.
- Encourage the federal government to increase the accessibility of employment programs to skilled immigrants who are not eligible for programming funded by Employment Insurance.
- Encourage the federal government to increase funding for labour market language training.
- Work with key stakeholders to further develop bridging programs for immigrants. Include modular components such as technical language training and Canadian work experience (e.g. mentorships and job placements).

5. Welcoming Workplaces

Increase awareness of the economic and societal benefits of diversity, awareness and understanding of the skills and knowledge of immigrants in Alberta workplaces, and encourage the involvement of industry, employers, employees, and labour organizations to maximize the ability of skilled immigrants to contribute economically.

Current Challenges and Opportunities:

- Some employers may have difficulty assessing skills of immigrants due to unfamiliarity with international credentials and work cultures.
- Some employers and employees may require assistance to deal with a culturally diverse workforce.
- Alberta has the opportunity to build on Alberta Community Development's supported initiatives that foster equality, address and reduce discrimination.

Recent Achievements Include:

Increased emphasis on workplace initiatives, specifically:

- Consulted with employers and reviewed human rights policies, provided educational materials and workshops to employers to help them create workplace environments that foster equality and that are free from discrimination.
- Employers were recognized for excelling at diversity practices through the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, Business Awards of Distinction - Diversity Leadership Award of Distinction.
- Consulted and provided grants to ethnocultural and multicultural organizations and immigrant serving agencies to assist them to work with employers to help create more inclusive workplaces.
- Interdepartmental committees and federal and provincial working groups assisted community-based organizations to develop welcoming communities and workplace strategies.

Next Steps:

- Continue to promote and develop programs and resources.
- Continue to promote the importance of inclusive workplaces and to encourage stakeholder involvement.
- Continue to work with all levels of government and communities to develop strategies that support more inclusive communities and workplaces.
- Develop a plan for increasing community and business involvement in initiatives that help immigrants feel welcome, respected, and included in the workplace.

6. Coordination

Increase coordination between stakeholders to build on best practices, determine common goals, priorities and strategies, to coordinate and evaluate activities, and to report and account for progress.

Current Challenges and Opportunities:

- Current programs and services targeted at skilled immigrants are mainly ad hoc or project-based to respond to specific identified needs.
- Although some current interventions involve collaboration among multiple stakeholders, there is no mechanism to collectively determine priorities, address priorities, and to ensure shared accountability among all stakeholders.

Recent Achievements Include:

- Cross-ministry working group met regularly to share information, seek input from key stakeholders and develop this strategic framework for integrating skilled immigrants.
- Alberta has represented these concerns at the Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM) and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). Consensus priority areas for skills and learning have been identified in both forums that include working groups on improving the labour market access for immigrants.
- Entered discussions with federal officials on pan-Canadian coordination on issues affecting international credential recognition.

Next Steps:

- Explore the development of planning, information sharing, and reporting mechanisms with stakeholders, such as an annual roundtable with key stakeholders, and an annual progress report.

E. Outcomes of Strategy

The goal of Alberta's strategy for integrating skilled immigrants is to maximize their ability to contribute their prior learning, skills and experience to benefit the Alberta economy.

Progress toward the objectives and outcomes as well as their appropriateness will be reviewed annually.

Short Term Objectives:

By 2007:

- Increase access to information for potential immigrants and immigrants in Alberta.
- Increase the number of programs and services for skilled immigrants to bridge their gaps in knowledge, skills and Canadian work experience.
- Graduates of bridging programs will have secured employment related to their education, training and experience.

Long Term Outcomes:

Specific targets and indicators will be established based on available resources. By 2014:

- Post-secondary institutions, professional associations, and occupational regulatory bodies make changes to facilitate access to their assessment and/or licensing processes.
- Alberta employers and employees understand and benefit from the contributions that immigrants bring to the workplace.
- Skilled immigrant income will be comparable to that of similarly skilled Canadian-born individuals.
- A high percentage of Alberta's skilled immigrants are employed in positions that utilize their qualifications.
- Alberta's skill shortages in occupations that require a post-secondary credential are reduced.

This strategy for integrating skilled immigrants along with making sure that Alberta workers have the skills to fill the jobs of the future and a made-in-Alberta immigration policy will "help position Alberta more competitively in the global marketplace, supplement the supply of skilled workers, and ensure full participation in Alberta's communities". [16]

[16] From *Today's Opportunities, Tomorrow's Promise: A Strategic Plan for the Government of Alberta*, Government of Alberta, March 2004, page 8.

Appendix 1 Current Programs, Services and Activities for Integrating Immigrants

Alberta Government

Program/Service Area	Description
Alberta Learning (AL)	
International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS)	Assesses educational qualifications for a fee (appr. $150 to the client). Approximately 2,000 annually. Demand for service increased by 28% on avg. annually, 1995-2001.
Apprenticeship and Industry Training	Assesses international credentials and formal training (certificates, work experience and training in the trades) to provide individuals with an opportunity to become certified Alberta tradespeople or to establish advanced standing in apprenticeship programs (fees are applicable). Web site and print materials for apprenticeship and trades related information.
ESL Trades	Offered at NorQuest College.
Immigrant Settlement Services	Funds immigrant serving agencies to provide a range of services to new immigrants including assistance with initial basic needs, interpretation and translation services, employment counselling and workshops.
Language Training Program	Funds English as a Second Language (ESL) assessment and referral services for adults in Edmonton and Calgary, and innovation in ESL (development of curricula, materials, research, pilots).
Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE)	
Alberta Service Centres Canada-Alberta Service Centres	Provide labour market information, counselling and workshops to all Albertans and income support for eligible Albertans. Regional delivery system. Community consultation annually.
Labour Market Programs	Provides labour market programs and services for Albertans. Programs include English as a Second Language (ESL), basic foundation skills, and skills training programs, for unemployed low-income Albertans and those eligible for Employment Insurance.
Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS)	Web site, print materials and hotline with career, learning and employment information. Co-funded by AL and AHRE, with administration in AHRE
Professions and Occupations	Responsible for regulated professions with the exception of the health professions, teachers and lawyers.
Labour Market Publications	Develop career and workplace resources such as the publication "Diversity: A strategy to meet your need for skilled workers".
Alberta Community Development (ACD)	
Human Rights and Citizenship Commission	Provides educational materials and initiatives that support employers and workers to create inclusive and discrimination free workplaces and provides services to help resolve and settle complaints of discrimination.
Human Rights, Citizenship, and Multiculturalism Education Fund	Supports and delivers programs and services that increase understanding and awareness of diversity, foster equality, and reduce discrimination so that all Albertans have the opportunity to participate in the social, economic and cultural life of the province.

Alberta Government Continued

Alberta Economic Development (AED)	
Economic Immigration	Markets Alberta as a destination for economic immigrants including skilled workers and business immigrants (entrepreneurs, self-employed, investors).
Provincial Nominee Program (PNP)	Facilitates the permanent residency of skilled workers to meet critical skills shortages for pre-approved employers in Alberta.
Alberta Health and Wellness (AHW)	
Alberta International Medical Graduates (IMG) Program	Family medicine residency program with eight training spaces in 2002 and 2003 and a further 16 family residency seats in 2004. Also an additional 12 specialty positions in 2004.
Part 5 Registered Physicians	Physicians who received their medical training certification outside Canada, and whose credentials allow provisional registration under Part 5, are granted a temporary, thirty month registration.
J-1 Visa Sponsorship	The J-1 Visa is an American document which allows medical graduates who are Canadian citizens or landed immigrants to undertake post-graduate specialist training in the U.S.
Rural Physician in Action Plan (RPAP)	AHW funds RPAP, which has a number of initiatives that would impact Part 5 (immigrant) physicians.
Regional Health Authority (RHA) International Medical Graduates (IMG) Initiatives	AHW funds the RHAs. The Capital Health Authority in Edmonton has two programs for IMGs, the IMG Preceptorship Program and the Capital Health Critical Care Clinical Preceptorship Program. This program will be extended to 2007 for 11 candidates. The Calgary Health Authority has an IMG Physician Assistant Program offered to six candidates, two each in a coronary care unit, internal medicine and diagnostic imaging department.

Pan-Canadian

Forum of Labour Market Ministers, Council of Ministers of Education, Canada	Federal/Provincial/Territorial (F/P/T) Consensus on Priority Areas is working to encourage the labour market participation of immigrants.
Forum of Labour Market Ministers	Labour mobility website.
Council of Ministers of Education, Canada	Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials.
Federal/Provincial/Territorial (F/P/T) Ministers of Immigration	Agreed to work together to resolve barriers facing skilled immigrants.
The Labour Mobility Coordinating Group	Facilitates national consultations with regulating organizations for 51 occupations across the country.
Canadian Alliance of Assessment Services	Works to increase portability of provincial credentials.
Inter-provincial Red Seal Program	44 trades in which individuals can receive a red seal for inter-provincial mobility.
Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment	Supports networking and provides support to members.
Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks	Canadian language benchmarks for professions, eg. nursing.
F/P/T Ministers of Health	Task Force on International Medical Graduates (IMGs) to examine regulatory barriers.

Federal Government

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)	
Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC)	Funds language training for new immigrants for settlement purposes, up to a Canadian Language Benchmarks Level 4 in Alberta.
Enhanced Language Training	Funds language training for employability purposes. Canadian Language Benchmarks Level 7 and above in Edmonton, Calgary and other major Canadian cities, and Benchmarks 1 to 10 elsewhere.
Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program	Co-funded with Alberta Learning. Funds immigrant serving agencies to provide a range of settlement services to new immigrants including assistance with initial basic needs, interpretation and translation services, employment counselling and workshops.
Host Program	Funds community agencies for volunteer matching programs, where a new immigrant is matched with a Canadian volunteer.
Resettlement Assistance Program	Provides income support and initial settlement services for refugees sponsored by the federal government.
Going to Canada Immigration Web Site	Developed jointly with Human Resources and Skill Development Canada and Industry Canada.
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC)	
Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs)	Funds training programs for Employment Insurance eligible immigrants through Labour Market Development Agreements, or funds programs directly with provinces that do not have LMDAs. Funds Centres for Internationally Trained Professionals in Toronto and Vancouver. Also funds programs for immigrant youth up to age 30.
Foreign Credential Recognition	Funds projects for international credential recognition in regulated occupations, focusing on nurses, physicians and engineers, and in un-regulated occupations.
Canadian Heritage	
Multiculturalism Program	Funds projects to promote institutional change, including projects to encourage changes in credential recognition.

Other Provinces

Ontario	▪ Access to Professions and Trades unit ▪ Website information, detailed occupational regulatory body fact sheets ▪ Sector Specific Terminology Information and Counselling (STIC) curriculum ▪ Initiatives to enable up to 150 International Medical Graduates (IMGs) to practice in Ontario including 110 new postgraduate training positions, Fast Track Pilot Program to assess IMGs, and an IMG resource centre ▪ Occupation-specific bridging programs
British Columbia	▪ BC International Qualifications Program includes development of web-based resources and loan program and pilot projects for trades and professions, including engineers and nurses, and partnerships with government and the private sector to assist skilled immigrants access the labour market. ▪ Adaptation of Ontario's Sector Specific Training Information and Counselling (STIC) curriculum ▪ BC Internationally Trained Professionals Network (BCITP Net) project to involve ethno-cultural communities in policy development
Manitoba	▪ Coordinating Committee and Minister's Committee developed a framework for a Manitoba strategy on qualifications recognition of highly skilled immigrants ▪ Credentials Recognition Program provides wage assistance and assessment assistance ▪ Pilot program to connect refugees to skills training ▪ Occupational Fact Sheets for occupations and professions ▪ Projects with regulatory bodies to implement prior learning assessment processes

Appendix 2 Organizations Invited to Provide Input

Acupuncture and Traditional Medicine Society of Alberta
Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board
Alberta Assessor's Association
Alberta Association of Architects
Alberta Association of Dental Technicians
Alberta Association, Canadian Institute of Planners
Alberta Association of Medical Radiation Technologists
Alberta Association of Naturopathic Practitioners
Alberta Association of Registered Nurses
Alberta College of Art and Design
Alberta College of Dental Technicians
Alberta College of Medical Laboratory Technologists
Alberta College of Optometrists
Alberta College of Pharmacists
Alberta College of Social Workers
Alberta College of Speech Language Pathologists and Audiologists
Alberta Dental Assistants Association
Alberta Dental Association and College
Alberta Dental Hygienists' Association
Alberta Economic Development Authority, Jobs for the Future
Alberta Home Economist and Human Ecology Association
Alberta Institute of Agrologists
Alberta Institute of Purchasing Management Association of Canada
Alberta Land Surveyors' Association
Alberta Network of Immigrant Women
Alberta Shorthand Reporters Association
Alberta Society of Engineering Technologists
Alberta Society of Professional Biologists
Alberta Veterinary Medical Association
Association of School Business Officials of Alberta
Association of the Chemical Profession of Alberta
Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta
Athabasca University
Banff Centre
Bow Valley College
Calgary Bridge Foundation for Youth
Calgary Catholic Immigration Society
Calgary Chamber of Commerce
Calgary Immigrant Aid Society
Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
Calgary Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
Calgary Multifunders Group
Canadian Information Processing Society of Alberta
Catholic Social Services
Central Alberta Economic Partnership - Labour Force Capacity Task Force
Central Alberta Refugee Effort (CARE)
Certified Management Accountants of Alberta
Changing Together - A Centre for Immigrant Women
Citizenship and Immigration Canada
College of Alberta Denturists
College of Alberta Professional Foresters of Alberta
College of Alberta Psychologists
College of Chiropractors of Alberta
College of Dieticians of Alberta
College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta
College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta
College of Physical Therapists of Alberta
Construction Owners Association
Cultural Diversity Institute
Diversity Calgary
Edmonton Chamber of Commerce
Edmonton Funders' Forum
Edmonton Immigrant Services Association
Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
Fairview College
Global Friendship Immigration Centre

Grant MacEwan College
Grande Prairie Regional College
Human Resources Development Canada
Institute of Certified Management Consultants of Alberta
Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta
Lethbridge Community College
Lethbridge Family Services
Medicine Hat College
Merit Contractors Association
Mount Royal College
NorQuest College
Northern Alberta Institute of Technology
Northern Lakes College
Portage College
Red Deer College
Registered Psychiatric Nurses' Association of Alberta
Saamis Immigrant Services Association
Society of Local Government Managers of Alberta
Southern Alberta Institute of Technology
University of Alberta
University of Calgary
University of Lethbridge
YMCA of Wood Buffalo